

Jeffords Proposes Decade-by-Decade Cuts To Greenhouse Gas Emissions Through 2050



Daily Report for Executives

The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc.
Publication Date: 2006-07-26

Climate Change

Jeffords Proposes Decade-by-Decade Cuts To Greenhouse Gas Emissions Through 2050

The United States would be required to gradually cut its emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to reach a total reduction of 80 percent from 1990 levels by 2050, under a bill introduced July 20 by Sen. James Jeffords (I-Vt.).

Jeffords' Global Warming Pollution Reduction Act (S. 3698) calls for a decade-by-decade reduction in greenhouse gas emissions beginning in 2010, using 1990-level emissions as a baseline. The proposed rate of reduction in the first decade equates to a 2 percent annual cut in emissions from 2010 through 2020, according to the bill.

The bill would require a total 27 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by 2030. By 2040, the United States would be required to cut its total emissions 54 percent from the 1990 baseline level, with total emissions reduced by 80 percent by 2050.

The senator, in remarks on the Senate floor, said there was a "broad consensus within the scientific community" that global warming "has begun, is largely the result of human activity, and is accelerating."

Jeffords, who will retire at the end of his current term in January 2007, said in prepared remarks that he was concerned his generation "has not left this planet in good health" and had offered the proposal as a "partial solution" to a global environmental problem "that dwarfs all others."

Atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations have increased by about 35 percent throughout the world since the beginning of the industrial age in the late 1800s, from 280 parts per million to the current level of 378 parts per million, Jeffords said.

The current concentration of such emissions is higher than at any time during the past 400,000 years and is expected to continue to climb through the end of this century unless dramatic action is taken, Jeffords said.

Jeffords' bill does not propose the establishment of a cap-and-trade system that would allow the trading of emissions allowances, or credits, but would provide the Environmental Protection Agency authority to implement one.

However, the legislation proposes mandatory greenhouse gas emission reductions for the automobile industry and the power sector.

Dramatic Action Urged.

According to the bill, the United States needs to take a leading role in cutting such emissions given that it emits "more global warming pollutants than any other country."

The bill notes that U.S. carbon dioxide emissions have increased by an average of 1.3 percent annually since 1990.

Dramatic reductions through 2050 are necessary because more modest curbs on such greenhouse gases are unlikely to prevent a rapid rise in global temperatures, according to Jeffords.

For example, even if global carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas concentrations are stabilized at 450 parts per million in this century, global temperatures would likely still increase between 2 and 4 degrees Fahrenheit, he said.

“Such warming will result in more extreme weather, increased flooding and drought, disruption of agricultural and water systems, threats to human health, and loss of sensitive species and ecosystems,” Jeffords said.

The bill also would require the United States to derive 20 percent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2020.

The bill was co-sponsored by Democratic Sens. Barbara Boxer (Calif.), Jeff Bingaman (N.M.), Daniel Akaka (Hawaii), Edward Kennedy (Mass.), Patrick Leahy (Vt.), Frank Lautenberg (N.J.), Jack Reed (R.I.), Paul Sarbanes (Md.), Christopher Dodd (Conn.), and Robert Menendez (N.J.).